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ABSTRACT

Annotations from 11 documents and journals in the ERIC system deal with ways for parents to evaluate schools and how parental evaluation can be utilized to improve school quality and parent-school relations. (MLF)

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# The Best of ERIC

Clearinghouse on Educational Management

***The Best of ERIC*** presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

The selections are intended to give the practicing educator easy access to the most significant and useful information available from ERIC. Because of space limitations, the items listed should be viewed as representative, rather than exhaustive, of literature meeting those criteria.

Materials were selected for inclusion from the ERIC catalogs ***Resources in Education (RIE)*** and ***Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE).***

This bibliography was prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management for distribution by the American Association of School Administrators, the Association of California School Administrators, and the Wisconsin Secondary School Administrators Association.

# Parent Evaluation of Schools

**1. Almen, Roy.** ***SEA Parent Opinion Survey—1974. Final Report.*** Minneapolis: Southeast Alternatives Program, Minneapolis Public Schools, 1974. 79 pages. ED 115 683.

How can parents best be involved in the evaluation of schools? In the Southeast Alternatives (SEA) Program in Minneapolis, parent evaluation is only one part of a larger attempt to involve parents in all parts of the school program.

For the SEA Parent Opinion Survey, three schools were selected as sites to test "alternate school styles." Because of the experimental nature of the project, school officials wanted to maintain especially close contact with parents. Administrators regularly sought out individual parent's opinions as well as group opinions on issues. Parents served on advisory councils and policy boards, and they provided feedback by means of questionnaires and interviews.

The personal opinion questionnaire has become one of the most prevalent means of gathering evaluations of school programs. It can be distributed on a large scale for a rather small cost and can be used to solicit a great amount of diverse information. In the SEA survey, Almen reports that all parents received two questionnaires. The first, more general set, was the same for all parents; a second packet of questions pertained to the specific experimental school their children attended. Parents were asked to evaluate new programs as well as their children's progress. They were asked how they preferred to have their children's progress reported to them.

Perhaps as important as the information about the experimental programs were the opinions of parents concerning their own involvement in school policy. A majority of parents believed that their interests would be best served by an "elected group" that "participate[d] directly in making decisions." A majority of parents were satisfied with their opportunities for involvement. Forty percent had volunteered for duty in some capacity.

**2. Fedorko, Helen Therese,** and **Rhodes, Doris S.** "Cooperation Is the Key." ***Momentum,*** 7, 4 (December 1976), pp. 17-20. EJ 158 017.

Parent evaluation of schools cannot take place unless parents are brought into the round of activities that occur in the school. According to these authors, home and school attitudes are related and must be mutually reinforcing. Parents must be fully involved with their children's education, and teachers and schools must be geared to help parents "state the goals they have for their individual child."

Unfortunately, many conditions thwart this ideal close involvement. In many homes both parents work. More families than ever before are led by a single parent. In these homes, school activities must compete with a great many other responsibilities. But even when time does exist, many parents are intimidated by the school atmosphere. Likewise, teachers may feel the presence of the parent in the school or classroom as an intrusion into their domain.

The authors recommend a program in which parents can comfortably observe their children's teacher in the classroom. Parents can observe "current methods of instruction and techniques of behavior control and classroom management." An informal discussion/information area could be provided for parents, and program directors could occasionally make presentations to parents on educational topics.

**3. Feldmesser, Robert A.,** and **McCready, Esther Ann.** ***Information for Parents on School Evaluation.*** Princeton, New Jersey: ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurements, and Evaluation, 1974. 7 pages. ED 099 432.

Early in their investigation of various guides written to help parents evaluate the quality of their schools, Feldmesser and McCready began to wonder "whether there is much genuine disagreement, at the non-technical level, about what a good school is." Much of the literature focuses on facilities, student-teacher ratios, school atmosphere, and test scores.

School districts themselves are generally ready to provide much of this statistical information. Several of the guides recommend that principals be used as sources of information about test scores, school policies, testing programs, and special education programs. Some of the guides under discussion provide evaluation forms that parents can ask principals to fill out. And almost invariably the guides recommend a personal visit to the school itself.

But the authors note that the evaluation guides all have a similar problem. Because none of this information is quantifiable, and because little or no information exists about the relationship between the quality of education and the variables of class size, buildings, or atmosphere, none of the guides specifies any priorities. That is, they fail to discuss what items might be traded off for others, since it is unlikely that any school will excel in all areas. Even the venerable school visit is

of questionable value, since none of the guides offers a list of systematic observation procedures.

The authors conclude that none of these guides is sufficient "to enable the citizen to evaluate a school or school system, or even particular aspects of it."

**4. Ferguson, D. Hugh.** "Can Your School Survive a Parent Evaluation?" ***National Elementary Principal,*** 56, 4 (March/April 1977), pp. 71-73. EJ 157 047.

Unfortunately, the evaluation of schools often occurs in a heated political atmosphere. This was the case recently at the Central Middle School in Newark, Delaware, where Ferguson is principal. A group of well-educated, affluent parents, concerned about declining test scores, busing, and a number of other social issues, petitioned the school board for the right to evaluate the school and its staff.

The issues, as Ferguson reports, were familiar ones: the call to return to basics, too much free time, a lack of discipline and homework, and not enough classes for gifted students. Despite the unclear aims of the petitioning group and its own often contradictory goals, Ferguson thought that for the "school board to appear skeptical of those credentials would have been disastrous to a working relationship between parents and board members." The message from parents was "beyond reconciliation and impossible to sidestep."

So began a year-long evaluation of the school. From a general open meeting in which all parent opinion was solicited, a task force of one hundred volunteer parents, six teachers, and two district directors was selected. A university dean of education chaired the force.

Ferguson reports that his role as principal during this difficult year was to keep a low public profile and to maintain staff morale while the school was under scrutiny. Parents observed classes without prior notice. They often pressed teachers for simple answers to complex problems. Teachers needed reassurance that statements made in these situations "would not come back to haunt them in evaluations."

Ultimately, Central Middle School was praised by the task force. "Perhaps the greatest value derived from the study was a better understanding by educated, articulate parents who did not understand middle schools and were somewhat perplexed . . . by preadolescent children."

**5. Harrison, Charles H.** "How Specialists Match Schools and Executives." ***Nation's Schools,*** 90, 3 (September 1972), pp. 58-60. EJ 063 188.

Business executives in the process of relocating in a new community are often assisted in their search for a good school system by professional companies that keep accurate records of many school districts. The information these companies collect and the methods they use to collect it provide a helpful guide to evaluating school systems in general.

Area Consultants (AC), a New York City firm, bases its evaluations on the assumption that "the quality of a school system can be accurately determined from information about its high schools." They believe that "not only are educational aspirations of the community reflected in its high school . . . but more statistics can be obtained from a high school than from an elementary school."

What information does the firm collect? The company asks school districts to fill out a High School Data Form, which asks for sixteen facts, among them the number of grades in the high school, current enrollment, average number in a classroom, student-teacher ratio, percent of faculty with advanced degrees, number of guidance counselors, percent of students who continue to college, teachers' salaries, advanced placement subjects, and honors courses offered.

One specific piece of information AC uses in its evaluations is the number of periods taught per day by English teachers. "English is an important subject that demands much of the teacher because of the papers that must be reviewed and corrected. So the quality of instruction has to be related to the number of classes the English teacher teaches." More than four periods is considered too many.

Harrison's guide and his additional "Ten Questions" that school managers should be able to answer are primarily intended for use by professional, white-collar parents.

**6. Johnson, Bruce.** "Taping Parent Opinion." ***Instructor,*** 79, 7 (March 1970), pp. 144-45. EJ 015 356.

Of the many means schools have devised to seek out and make use of parent opinions about schools, Johnson reports on one of the most creative. At Stanley Elementary School in Tacoma, Washington, officials had a difficult time getting parents in this racially mixed, low-income neighborhood to voice their feelings about school affairs. They were generally intimidated both in private meetings with teachers and mass meetings with school board members.

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11. National School Boards Association, 1055 Thomas Jefferson St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007. Single copy of March 1975 issue, $3.00.

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To combat this situation, administrators at the school issued formal invitations to parents, followed by personal contacts, asking them to meet in "informal, round-table discussions on school programs." The discussions were scheduled in late afternoons and evenings so working parents could attend more easily.

At each meeting—with only three or four parents present—a school official gave a brief introduction, started a tape recorder, and left the parents alone. In this unstructured situation, they spoke freely about their concerns. Later the recordings were edited into a longer tape, studied, and recommendations were drawn from it.

Johnson wants to lay to rest the myth that low-income parents are not concerned about the education of their children. These parents were deeply concerned about a variety of issues. They wanted the schools to teach creativity, to encourage individualized instruction, and to promote racial harmony. Johnson believes, however, that parents in low-income neighborhoods do not need to be involved in programs ***before*** they are implemented because the parents are not familiar with many educational procedures.

**7. Johnson, Lary.** ***A Survey of Parents of Students at Jordan Junior High School.*** Minneapolis: Department of Research and Evaluation, Minneapolis Public Schools, 1974. 27 pages. ED 117 138.

When Minneapolis recently implemented a new desegregation/integration plan, the minority population of Jordan Junior High School nearly quadrupled in one year. To see how parents felt about the new integration policies and about the quality of education at Jordan, a sampling of parents in all racial groups was taken by the Minneapolis Public Schools Department of Research and Evaluation.

Parents were interviewed in their homes about three specific topics: "parent satisfaction with the educational program," "parent preference for the two kinds of pupil progress reporting systems used at Jordan," and "parent feelings about desegregation and its impact on their children." The survey consisted of twenty-five questions, for which parents could choose from four different responses, ranging from "very satisfied" to "very dissatisfied." After each question parents were encouraged to include comments, though less than half did. The final questions asked parents to relate negative and positive experiences their children went through as a result of the school boundary change.

The survey showed that parents "overall were satisfied with the educational programs" and with their children's progress in the specific areas of reading and math.

While it was not especially ambitious, the survey at Jordan provides an example of soliciting parent opinion on both very general and very specific topics. It is a good example of an evaluation procedure brought to bear on a localized problem.

**8. Middleton, M. A.** ***An Evaluation of the Family Life Education Course at Eric Hamber Secondary School.*** Vancouver, British Columbia: Education Services Group, Vancouver Board of School Trustees, 1975. 44 pages. ED 132 186.

By involving parents regularly in evaluations of school programs, administrators can anticipate problems and devise more informative, responsive courses for students. In the case of potentially controversial or sensitive subject matter (such as marriage, the family, and sex), it is extremely important to involve parents and to get their approval.

At the Eric Hamber Secondary School in Vancouver, British Columbia, program coordinators of the Family Life Education Course surveyed parents and students. Questions concerned the appropriateness of subject matter, the general level at which subjects should be taught, and whether parental permission should be necessary to take the course. Participants were also asked to rate program objectives according to their importance.

While parents overwhelmingly approved of the course contents, they suggested the addition of material covering family budgeting and choosing a marriage partner.

The questionnaire is included in the report.

**9. National Urban League.** ***Parent Power and Public Schools: A Guide for Parent Advocacy.*** New York: Education Division, 1972. 17 pages. ED 081 876.

Acting on the proposition that the "quality of our schools must not depend on the economic or racial quirk of fate imposed upon the neighborhood in which a child's parents happen to live," this Urban League handbook provides guidelines for low-income parents to judge the quality of their children's schools.

Like many guides for evaluating schools, the handbook recommends that parents visit classrooms and observe teachers. It asks parents to consider whether their children are treated with respect. Does the teacher make reasonable assignments? Are the lessons dull and repetitious or lively and interesting? The handbook urges parents to visit special classes and the library. They should inquire about testing facilities. Parents should insist that their children be fully tested, if necessary, outside of school.

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Besides processing documents and journal articles, the Clearinghouse prepares bibliographies, literature reviews, monographs, and other interpretive research studies on topics in its educational area.

This publication was prepared pursuant to a contract with the National Institute of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Prior to publication, the manuscript was submitted to the American Association of School Administrators for critical review and determination of professional competence. This publication has met such standards. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of either the American Association of School Administrators or the National Institute of Education.

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For low-income parents the public schools can be a nightmare of bureaucracy and intimidation. For them, the question of school quality is more than pupil-teacher ratios, test scores, honor societies, and the qualities usually used to measure middle-class schools. The school is frequently seen as an adversary. The handbook advises that parents know and follow the school's legal guidelines. When visiting schools, parents are advised to take a friend for support and as a witness to the proceedings. One long section in the handbook is devoted to the legal intricacies of expulsion, truancy, and punishment.

The picture of a good school that emerges here is one in which parents are treated honestly and made to feel at home in the schools. They are treated with respect, and their grievances are handled openly and quickly.

**10. Riles, Wilson C.** "ECE in California Passes Its First Tests." ***Phi Delta Kappan***, 57, 1 (September 1975), pp. 3-7. EJ 122 522.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) program in California is an attempt to restructure the K-3 program. It is characterized by a low pupil-teacher ratio, individual instruction, and parental involvement. ECE has no categorical programing. Each child is treated as an individual learner.

A unique aspect of the ECE program is the way parents are involved functionally. They serve on ECE advisory committees at each school. They help prepare instructional materials, and they work with students in a one-to-one relationship in the classroom. Each parent brings a different cultural background, pursuits, and interests to the school.

Riles acknowledges that it is difficult to move parents into the program. In addition to the traditional parent apathy, one must contend with the fact of working parents. When parents are found, they must first be educated into the program. To provide initial training, the district offers seminars for the parents either in the classroom or in mobile units. As part of their training they observe children in the classroom. They work together in groups and study educational materials.

Many of the concepts Riles proposes have become state policy through their incorporation in A.B. 65, which recently passed the California legislature.

**11. Thomas, M. Donald.** "How to Recognize a Gem of a School When You See One." ***American School Board Journal***, 162, 3 (March 1975), pp. 27-30. EJ 112 493.

The habit of measuring a school's quality in terms of its hardware, software, budget, course selection lists, the number of books per child, expenditure per child, and student-staff ratio is "suspect, if not downright worthless," Thomas asserts. Such indicators tell us merely "how rich a school district is, not how good its schools are." Thomas believes that only the traditional school visit can reveal a school's quality. He offers six questions that the visit should answer.

What are the school's basic purposes? School principals and teachers should be able to articulate "exactly what the school is trying to achieve during a particular year." They should be able to state goals in terms of skills and achievement levels.

What degree of respect for children does the school exhibit? Good schools, says Thomas, respect all children, and "uniqueness is valued above sameness." Children are encouraged to choose their own reading materials.

What alternatives in learning opportunities does the school offer? A good school recognizes that not all children learn in the same ways.

What kind of self-concept do the children exhibit? In good schools children are given "positive verbals" to live up to. A child who does badly on an exam is never criticized for being sloppy or lazy.

How positive are the attitudes exhibited in the school toward the school? In a good school, morale will be high. Principals and teachers will talk openly about their problems.

What kind of home-school relationships does the school maintain? Good schools plan regular conferences for parents and teachers. All statistical information pertaining to the child (psychological tests, health records, achievement tests) will be readily available to parents.

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